

Day Four: Assertive Leadership

Objectives

Participants will:

- * Assertively provide crews with the leadership they need to do the job.
- * Take responsibility for the work of the crew.
- * Communicate appropriate performance standards.
- * Contribute to work plans as needed and communicate them to crews.



Contents of Today's Class:

You're In Charge!	81
Know What you Want to Do	82
Take Ownership	83
Measure the Work.	85
Know the Standards for the Work	86
Communicate the Standards to the Crew	89
Fit in with Plans	90
Case Studies	91
Summary	98

Reading - Discussion

You're In Charge!

Leadership is always personal. It is always a one-on-one relationship with each member of your crew. When the crew members think about the job they see your face in their mind's eye. You represent the organization. You create the environment in which they work.

Supervisors have a tremendous impact on the working life of employees. Part of the employees' job satisfaction is their consideration of how they like to work for you.

Because supervision is so personal, you need to work the following factors into the leadership role you choose to play:

1. Know what you want to do.
2. Take personal responsibility for the work.
3. Measure the work.
4. Know the standards to which you are going to hold the crew accountable as well as the standards you have for yourself.
5. Know the plans of the organization and how to contribute to those plans.

All of these points add up to the skill of "taking charge" as a leader.

Reading - Discussion

1. Know What you Want to Do

Always spend some time getting clear in your own mind what you want to do. You will always be asked what you plan on doing. The crew deserves an answer.

Use the time before the crew goes to the work site, either in a break room, the shop, or in the truck, to explain how you want to tackle the job.

Example: *“We’ve got a brush cutting job this morning out on route 9 near Hoosick. I want to see if we can get all the traffic sight lines improved by about noon. We want to leave that stretch of road looking good.”*

Tony and Jim, hook up the chipper to a heavy dump. Mary Ann, help Tim and Charlie load traffic cones onto the dump. Taylor draw the brush cutting tools from stores. Let’s go!”

Reading - Discussion

2. Take Personal Responsibility for the Work.

When you give an assignment, or communicate a work plan, it needs to come from you personally. The crew members look to you as the boss. People don't want to work for someone who is only transmitting messages. The crew needs to know that you personally want them to do what you are asking. If you act only as a messenger, you weaken your own authority. If you say: "We have to do it this way because the HMS2 wants it done that way," you become less of a leader. Don't rely on higher authority to justify your leadership. Ask people to do things because they're the right things to do.

Assertiveness

Taking ownership of the work means being assertive. Assertiveness is a form of behavior that demonstrates your respect for yourself as well as for the other person. It comes from the assumption on your part that you are "OK" and that the other person is equally "OK." You can take this attitude if you have built the atmosphere of trust, caring and respect discussed earlier in this program.

By contrast, aggressive behavior is based on the assumption that you are "OK," but the other person is not "OK." Aggressive behavior involves blame and fault-finding. Aggression harms the other person on some level. There is very little use for this kind of behavior at work. You do want to let people know how you feel about things, but you don't want to confuse things with personal animosity.

Further, passive behavior, or "passive-aggressive" behavior is based on the assumption that circumstances make it impossible for you to take any positive action. This kind of behavior can involve tolerating actions that you know to be wrong, or inappropriate for work. This is called "setting people up to fail." Passive-aggressive behavior is just as destructive of your leadership as aggressive behavior. If they fail, you have failed too!

An assertive leader uses "I language." "I language" lets you take ownership of your feelings and actions. It involves using the word "I" to identify what you want.

For instance, if you have a job that needs to be done, you say to the crew member: "Jim, There's some median mowing that needs doing on Rte 309. I want you to take the batwing and do the job this morning."

Taking Charge

This way Jim knows that you are giving him an assignment.

If the situation calls for a more polite tone, if you are requesting something unusual, You could say:

“Jim, Please do this job for me.”

In either case, you have taken ownership of the task, and Jim knows why and for whom he is doing the task.

By contrast, if you were to say things like:

“Jim, you should do this job . . . ”

or,

“Jim, can you do this?”

or:

“Jim, don’t you think it would be a good idea to do this....”

Jim is then left unclear as to whether or not he should really do the task and what his relationship is to you. If you make it clear that you, personally, want the task done, you maintain your leadership.

Reading - Discussion - Exercise

3. Measure the work.

What gets measured is what gets done.

If you don't measure, you can't tell success from failure.

If you can't see success, you can't reward it.

If you can't reward success, you are probably rewarding failure.

From: Osborne and Gaebler, Reinventing Government

What are your measurements of work?

Task:	Measure:
Snow & Ice removal	lane miles cleared
Mowing	
Guide Rail repair	
Sightline improvement	
Drainage improvement	
Paving	
Patching pot holes	
Repairing bridge joints	
Storm debris clean-up	

Reading - Discussion

4. Know the standards to which you are going to hold the crew accountable as well as the standards you have for yourself.

Standards are the specific expectations you have for each task. Supervisors set standards by using the measurements appropriate to each job. For example, the standard measurements for plowing snow involve *lane miles plowed in given periods of time*. For each specific beat, the supervisor must take into account the type of road, storm conditions, traffic conditions, and other factors specific to the situation. The supervisor then decides what he or she expects from the driver of that beat on that day. The expectation may vary according to conditions, but the supervisor must decide what is expected from the employee for every assignment.

Standards are flexible and have to be interpreted every day to meet the particular situation facing you.

If you have specific, well-thought out standards, evaluating performance becomes easy. If, on the other hand, you do not have standards that you can put into words, you have no way of talking to crew members about performance.

Think of specific situations, times and places in which the following jobs are performed. What typical standards would you assign to individuals performing these operations? Take into account differing individual skill levels.

Standards Exercise

Measurements and Typical Standards (both quantity and quality)

Task:	Unit of Measure:	Performance Standard:
Snow & Ice Removal	lane miles cleared	<i>Quantity:</i> for Beat #3 on a given day: 30 lane miles plowed and/or treated within 3 hours of the onset of the storm. <i>Quality:</i> Snow accumulations should be dealt with while still plowable and not allowed to develop into hard-pack.
Guide Rail Repair		
Sightline Improvement		
Drainage Improvement		

Taking Charge

Task:	Unit of Measure:	Performance Standard:
Paving		
Patching Pot Holes		
Repairing Bridge Joints		
Storm Debris Cleanup		

Case Study

Communicating Standards

How would you explain performance standards? Think about the kind of language you would use, and how you could encourage the crew member to improve performance. Consider the problem from two points of view:

- (1) If you are getting the performance you want,
- or
- (2) If you are not getting the performance you want.

Tips:

Focus on observable behavior, not on personality traits.

Describe specific activities.

Maintain good relations with the employee.

Support the employee's morale.

Describe tasks and standards in terms of what you actually need from the employee. Avoid describing tasks and standards in terms of what the employee "should" be doing.

"Salty"

The Situation:

You are a first line supervisor in charge of a snow and ice operation. You are out checking road conditions and you notice that on Tony's beat there is a lot of salt scattered on the shoulder and that there is a lot of salt bouncing around on bare pavement. Back at the shop you check reports on salt usage rates. You decide to talk to Tony about putting down more salt than is necessary. Tony is one of the more skilled workers on your crew and you are inclined to believe that you are dealing with a misunderstanding of the salt application process.

Question:

How do you discuss this with Tony?

Discussion***5. Know the plans of the organization and how to contribute to those plans.***

First line supervisors play a role in all of the maintenance plans that come from the residency, shop, regional, or main office level. These plans include the annual snow and ice plan, the summer work plan that includes paving, guide rail repair plans, tree pruning plans, bridge repair plans and work orders.

The first and second line supervisors communicate these plans to the crew and are responsible for observing and reporting conditions in the field, making suggestions for modifying plans, and seeing that goals and objectives are met.

What information do you contribute to these plans? When and how do you contribute your information?

Snow and Ice Plan -

Summer Work Plan -

Bridge Repair Plans -

Tree Pruning Plans -

Sign Replacement Plans -

Case Study

OPP or not OPP?

The Situation:

You are in the shop with the crew after a safety meeting. Mary Ann and Mike get into a heated discussion with you about OPP. Mike likes to work alone. He says that OPP is great because he doesn't like to be bothered by a passenger. Mary Ann contradicts him. She tells him he needs to learn to work with people. She says two person plowing is safer for the kind of work the crew has to do in the winter. She says that the residency tries to find ways around the OPP policy whenever possible. If it can be justified, the HMS2 will send out two drivers even if he has to bend the policy a little. Mary Ann and Mike ask you if this is the truth. The rest of the crew is very curious to hear your answer.

Question:

How do you respond to Mary Ann and Mike?

Case Study***No Certified Operator*****The Situation:**

Your HMS2, George, calls on the radio with an emergency job. A stretch of highway has been flooded and needs ditching before noon to open up proper drainage. The current flooding has past its peak and is seeping into the basements of local property owners who have complained to local emergency services. George says that you and your crew are the only ones available to meet this particular emergency. Unfortunately, you have to tell George that your only certified excavator operator, Sam, is out with the flu. George considers this, but adds that the RE told him that the job has to get done. George adds that he is busy on the other side of the county.

(For this case study only, assume that you are not certified on the Excavator.)

Question:

What do you discuss with George and what decisions do you make?

Case Study

Reasonable Suspicion

The Situation:

You are loading trucks with salt and you think you smell alcohol on the breath of one of the drivers, Charlie. You ask Tony if he agrees. Jim and Sam, who overhear you, ask you to come into the break room to discuss this. In the break room, Jim and Sam ask you privately not to do anything about Charlie. They say that they can take care of Charlie and make sure that he's OK to drive. They say they want to solve the problem within the crew and they ask for your cooperation.

Question:

What do you tell them?

Case Study***Who Gets to Be in Charge?*****The Situation:**

Both you and Sam, your HMW2, have been notified that you must attend an emergency training session on a new DOT policy this morning. The crew's assignment for the day is to build a catch basin. You have to tell the crew that Tony is going to be in charge today instead of you or Sam. When you tell this to the crew, Jim steps forward and asks you why Tony gets to be in charge. Jim says that other people on the crew have been here longer. The rest of the crew waits for your answer.

Question:

What do you say?

Case Study

Wet Pavement

The Situation:

You are a new HMS1 in charge of a guide rail crew. The weather today is intermittent rain. You get to the job site and start setting up the work zone safety. Before you can get down to work Sam states in front of the whole crew that it is unsafe to be working along the shoulder of the highway due to the wet pavement. Sam says this could cause a passing motorist to lose control. He suggests that the crew return to the shop.

Question:

What do you say to Sam?

Case Study***Equipment Breakage*****The Situation:**

You have set up and are operating a work zone when Jim, who is directing traffic with a stop/slow paddle, reports to you that somehow the paddle got broken and requests to use a flag. You inform Jim that we are supposed to be using the paddles and you provide a replacement paddle. Shortly thereafter Jim reports that the new paddle just broke.

Question:

What do you do?

Case Study

Picking Litter

The Situation:

You and your crew have finished a project early one day and you are on your way back to the residency with the crew in a 6-person patrol truck. You pass a stretch of highway that is loaded with litter. You pull off the highway, turn to the crew and tell them that you want to get this cleaned up right away. The crew does not look enthusiastic. Jim suggests returning tomorrow and dealing with the litter then. The crew just looks at you and waits for your reply.

Question:

What do you say?

Summary



Know what you want to do.

Take personal responsibility for the work

Measure the work.

Know the standards to which you are going to hold the crew and yourself accountable.

Know the plans of the organization and how to contribute to those plans.

In Review:

Build trust by displaying Reliability, Caring and Respect.

Always know why you are communicating.

Decide on how much control to use over the situation and the people involved.

Be prepared to explain your choice of leadership style.

Be clear about your expectations of their work.

Understand the key skills you want to develop in your crew members.

Challenge them to stretch their abilities.

